

Philippians 2:17-30

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[0:00] Good morning, CFC. Go ahead and turn with your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2. We're going to be starting in verse 17. And for those who are paying attention to bullets, and we're supposed to start in verse 19, but I called an audible, so hopefully I'm invited back.

Let's see. Yeah, we'll be in verse 17. And before we actually read from there, I just wanted to read a brief quote, because I think it sets the stage well for what we're about to read.

This quote is from John MacArthur, and he says, Philippians 2, 17 through 30, presents three men whose lives are exceptional patterns for godly living.

These three, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, were together in Rome at this time. Paul was a prisoner in his own rented quarters. Though chained to a soldier, he was free to carry on his work unhindered, Acts 28, 16.

And Timothy, the apostle's son in the faith, 1 Timothy 1, 2, had been with him for some time. Epaphroditus had been sent from the Philippian church to bring financial support for Paul and to minister to his needs.

[1:13] The men were knit together geographically, spiritually, and ministerially in a common cause. Each was passionately devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, not consumed with his own interests.

For the Lord's sake, each had risked his health, his freedom, and even his life. So let's now read our passage, and I'll trust that you'll see some of those themes we just read there emerge and be woven into the text.

But again, our text is Philippians 2, starting verse 17. And Paul writes, Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

[2:19] But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me.

And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. Verse 25. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need.

For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed, he was ill near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not on him, but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men.

For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. So a quick outline here, and don't worry about writing these down, because I'll repeat them later, but we just have four points this morning.

[3:33] Point one, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are going to serve as an example or a paradigm of everything Paul has exhorted the Philippians to be so far. We'll talk about what that is.

Point two is that these three men knew and loved each other, as well as the Philippians. Point three, we are called to be relational because the Trinity is relational. And point four, the gospel undergirds everything.

And then we'll close with some application. But I just want to lay those out so you get an idea of where we're going. But really briefly, I also want to summarize where we're at so far in this text.

What has happened so far in this epistle to the Philippians?

So Paul writes with thankfulness and joy to the Philippians, quote, because of their partnership in the gospel, Philippians 1.5. His prayer for them is that they would abound in love more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that they may approve what is excellent, Philippians 1.9-10. Paul then explains the joy it is to suffer in prison while knowing that it is advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ, Philippians 1.12-30. Paul then exhorts the church of Philippi, saying, quote, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[5 : 02] That's Philippians 1.27. And Paul explains that the key to this worthy life, this life that is side by side, consisting of one mind and one spirit, is humility, as exemplified by our Lord himself, in Philippians 2.1-11, who came down in the form of man.

So in light of Christ's personal work, Paul calls the church of Philippi to continue in the work of sanctification, which is the work of God, Philippians 1.6. And an outflow of this is doing all things without grumbling or questioning, but rather sacrificing oneself with gladness and rejoicing. Philippians 2.14-18. So this is my very quick summary of what we have covered so far in this epistle. You might be wondering, okay, Christ is our great example of humility, joy, righteousness, obedience, etc.

But what does it look like for a sinner or a community of sinners to replicate Christlikeness? Why is this passage that we're about to read included? It seems somewhat out of place.

So this leads me to my first point. Point number one, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are an example or a paradigm of everything Paul has exhorted the Philippians to be so far.

[6 : 15] So like I said, this text seems out of place. Why might I say that? Because normally when you read a Pauline epistle, he's going to put something personal and logistical like this text towards the end of his epistle.

And yet this is right smack dab in the middle of Philippians. So if you accept that the section is not out of place, which I don't think it is, then the best justification of Paul writing verses 19 through 30 right here would be to tie it into what has already been said.

Paul commands the Philippians that they should be glad and rejoice with him, 2.18. Notice the repeated command within our main body. Paul says the Philippian church should, quote, rejoice at seeing Epaphroditus again in verse 28, and that they should receive him in the Lord with all joy, in verse 29.

Paul also commanded the Philippians to do all things without grumbling or questioning, in verse 14. So think about Epaphroditus. It is mentioned twice that he almost died, verse 27, verse 30.

And Epaphroditus willingly risked his life to serve Paul and ultimately Christ. Does that not sound like a man, somebody who does things without questioning or grumbling?

[7 : 33] How on earth could you willfully sacrifice yourself to the point of death and serving another while grumbling and questioning? Those things don't compute. You cannot. So clearly, Epaphroditus is a good example of a soldier, verse 25, who takes his orders and obeys them diligently without thought of self.

Of course, we see Paul in 2.17 expressing the same selfless attitude. He joyfully sacrifices himself for the benefit of the other's faith and the glory of God.

In Timothy, the text says it all, there is no one like him who will genuinely be concerned for the Philippians or others. Welfare, verse 20. So Paul emphasizes humility throughout this epistle.

Paul's greatest argument for humility being necessary is our Lord's own humility and coming down and form a man, as I mentioned earlier, 2.8. No one is a greater example of humility than Christ, but still, by God's grace, the Philippian church was given other examples of humility in Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Timothy submitted himself to Paul as a child submits to a father. A very humbling thing to do. And again, both Paul and Epaphroditus, that's going to happen a couple times today, and Epaphroditus show their humble qualities and their willingness to die for the work of the gospel.

[9 : 00] So Paul sets himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus up as examples of humility, of joyful serving, and so on to be followed. So now we see how this text fits with the flow of Paul's epistle.

So what can we learn about these men from this text? And this leads me to point number two. So point number two, these three men knew and loved each other as well as the Philippians.

These three men knew and loved each other as well as the Philippians. It goes almost without saying that this text is highly relational. I say almost because it is easy for us to imagine Paul in his ivory tower writing all his brilliant epistles to the churches.

I mean, after all, how could he have time to write so much? Unless he had his tea, his desk, his lampstand, no distractions like pesky people. Right? Gosh, they're the worst. No. I mean, we forget that Paul was a traveling missionary and he loved people.

He loved the church. He went all over the place from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to the Greek Peninsula and to Rome. He was in prison and still showing concern and care for the churches that he was a part of that he helped planted in writing this epistle.

[10:12] But the point is that Paul knew these people and came alongside them, not choosing to just send letters from an ivory tower. He was not on his own island, but in relationship with the body of the church.

We see this relational aspect in a few ways within our text. Paul calls Timothy his son and they served together. Verse 22. Paul relies on Timothy as indicated by the fact that Paul intends to send him.

After he learns more of his own situation, he's going to send Timothy to Philippi. So he relies on Timothy. That's verse 23. Paul calls Epaphroditus his brother, his fellow soldier, his fellow worker, and minister to Paul's own needs.

Verse 24. So again, notice that relying language. Paul relies on Epaphroditus, not just Timothy. And notice how all those descriptions are relational.

My fellow soldier, my fellow brother. These men knew each other. This relational aspect does not just cover Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, but also each of their relationships to the Philippian church.

[11:22] Paul wants to send Timothy so that Paul may be cheered by news of the Philippians, 219. Timothy genuinely cares about the Philippians, 220. And Timothy is known by the Philippians, apparently, since he has a, quote, proven worth, verse 22.

And Paul wants to come to Philippi to be with the church, the people, verse 24, right? It's not just a organization, but a people group. And Epaphroditus has been longing for the Philippian church, in verse 26.

Paul wants to send Epaphroditus to the church because he expects they will rejoice at seeing him, verse 28. And he expects this because they obviously know Epaphroditus, who is from Philippi. So this may have seemed like overkill, but clearly Paul writes in an overtly relational manner. There is something here that he wants the Philippians to notice, and us by extension.

I think he is reaffirming the trustworthiness of these servants by highlighting their Christ-like characteristics. This can be deduced by noticing how they love one another.

[12:31] The Apostle John tells us, Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

First John 2, 9-10. So this issue of loving others is imperative and cannot be overstated in gospel ministry. Further, I think Paul is showing the necessity of such love and servanthood within the church.

Notice that phrase in 2-21. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Who are these they that Paul is speaking of?

So Paul is in Rome, he is in prison there. So he must be talking about the Romans, right? The Roman church. Sadly, Paul could not find anyone in Rome where he was imprisoned that looked out for the interests of others rather than themselves.

Previously, Paul had exhorted the Philippians to look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others in verse 4 of chapter 2. And this sounds like Jesus, who assumed people loved themselves and commanded people to love their neighbors.

[13:44] Matthew 22, 39. So Paul is assuming that they will look after their own interests. He is not worried about that. But rather, he is worried that they will remember to look after the interests of others.

But now we see he is surrounded by people who seek their own interests. And one of the resulting problems is that they are useless for the ministry. And ministry is at the very least the outflow of loving God and loving neighbor faithfully.

So contrast Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul with these Romans that Paul speaks of. And it becomes abundantly clear why those two whom Paul desires to send are the ones that he wants to send.

So Paul wants every Christian to understand his or herself in light of being a part of the body of Christ. A community with interrelationships.

They all know each other. This relational aspect is deeply theological, which leads me to the third point. And this one will be quick, but really important.

[14:48] And I'm going to go through it slowly because it's about the Trinity. And anybody who's ever studied that, you know you're one breath away from heresy. If you mess up your sentence. So I'm going to go slow but quick. So point number three.

We are called to be relational because the Trinity is relational. We are called to be relational because the Trinity is relational. Have you ever wondered why God appoints leaders?

Why he calls his followers to join the church community? After all, why can't we just find our own caves and worship God where we can be free from the temptations and troubles of this world? Isn't it God who sanctifies?

Why do I need an elder? Why do I need people? Why do I need a church? Right? Well, a lot could be said to answer that objection. I did want to focus on the fact that the Trinity is relational.

Even before the world was created, we see the Trinity, three persons in one divine essence, communicating with one another or relating. Genesis 1.26 says, Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.

[15:59] Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is constantly searching everything, even the depths of God. 1 Corinthians 2.10. Which means a lot of things.

But one thing is clear. God the Spirit has a significant relationship to God the Father. Likewise, God the Son obeys the will of God the Father, John 6.38, and sends God the Spirit to help his disciples, John 14.16.

The Trinity is the basis for the church's inner relationships. He's building this case from the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and their relationships to one another and saying, Thus, likewise, so it be with the church.

Right? That's the theological underpinning of this. Jesus asked the Father in his prayer in Gethsemane. He says, Keep them, the church, in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

That's Christ's prayer to the Father. Son speaking to the Father. Let us be one. Let them be one, even as we are one. John 17.11. He later adds, That sounds like the unity and the oneness and the love that Paul is expressing in Philippians, doesn't it?

[17:26] We worship God by imitating him in the things that he has called us to imitate him in. Some call these the communicable attributes of God.

But just a brief list, some examples here that I think are prevalent throughout Philippians. We are to love because God is love. We are to be humble because God is humble. We are to be meek because God is meek.

We are to be gracious because God is gracious. And we are to be relational because God is relational. And so on and so on. So now you're starting to see more of the beauty and the purpose behind Philippians 2.17-30 and Paul's epistle.

In that text, we see three men and their relationship to one another along with the Philippians. These are God-honoring relationships shaped by obedience.

And these relationships are only possible because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Which leads me to the final point, point number four. The gospel undergirds everything.

[18:32] I don't know about you guys, but I always hear Clay reading in his Scottish accent, the KJV with the gird. You know, gird up your leggings. You know, the way he says that. The gospel undergirds everything.

Point number four. So Paul is willing to sacrifice himself for the Philippians' faith. Chapter 2, verse 17. That is gospel language, right?

For their faith, their faith in the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then we learn what Timothy is doing with Paul. He is serving with Paul, quote, in the gospel. Verse 22. Likewise, Epaphroditus is a fellow soldier of the gospel, fellow worker for the gospel, and a minister of the gospel to Paul's needs.

And Paul sends him as a messenger of the gospel to the Philippians. Chapter 2, verse 25. A messenger of news about Paul, to be sure.

But I think more importantly and more primarily, a messenger of the gospel. We have mentioned that Epaphroditus nearly died. But what did he nearly die for?

[19 : 38] Well, he nearly died for, quote, the work of Christ. Verse 30. Which could also be rephrased as the work of the gospel. Epaphroditus is serving the mission of Christ, which is to preach the gospel.

And being about the work of fulfilling the great commission, which we see in Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20. But I want to highlight the amazing unity and oneness that these three men have together.

Because we often forget the hostilities that existed during this time. Paul is a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee, which we're going to see later in Philippians chapter 3, verse 5.

Timothy was half Greek and uncircumcised, which to a pre-converted Paul would have been an anathema. And Paul, of course, circumcises him later in Acts 16, 1 through 5.

But just understand the tension that would have existed there from a worldly standpoint. Half Greek, uncircumcised, to a Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee, circumcised one, right?

[20 : 40] Timothy would have been an anathema. And we know little about Epaphroditus, but he was almost certainly a full-blooded Greek, being a native of Philippi. And the fact that his Greek name was a very common Greek name, and it meant, quote, favorite of Epaphrodite.

Epaphrodite, sorry, mispronounced that. This all matters because we know that Jews and Gentiles did not get along. And even within the Greek world, there was much disunity, division, hate, all kinds of hostilities.

And if you don't know what I'm talking about, just go read about some of the Greek city-state wars sometime, and you'll realize how much the Greeks hated each other. Right? I mean, there's all kinds of division going here, not just between Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus, but even within Timothy and Epaphroditus being from different regions.

It would not necessarily have gotten along. Yet, despite all these factors that normally would have been reason upon reason for these three men to reject one another, they love one another in unity and oneness because of the gospel.

Paul writes, quote, There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3.28 He also says that believers share, quote, One body and one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

[22 : 02] Ephesians 4.4-6 So these men were willing to be faithful to God, and as a result, they were able to stand side by side in the faith.

They were not arguing and dividing over tertiary issues that Nathan talked about a few weeks back. Right? Doctrines that they matter, but they don't. Right? I mean, you don't let them divide you.

So in closing, I want to offer four simple applications that I think come right from this text. Now let me say that I'm really thankful that our church practices these things that I'm about to prescribe.

So these are offered as encouragement to continue in the good work, right, that we should joyfully participate in. So application number one. We should be known by our active love for one another.

This can mean house visits, meal trains, helping one another with projects, serving one another, listening well, and so on. I'm so thankful our church is characteristically doing those things.

[23 : 07] I love all the interactions on Slack, despite the trolls we have. You know who you are. It is a joyful and humbling thing to see how everyone in the church comes together to serve one another.

It can be a very convicting thing when I'm tired and don't want to, but I see everybody else jumping in on Slack. But that's application number one, active love.

We should be known by our love for one another. Application number two. Paul commended and endorsed Timothy and Epaphroditus because of their character and faithfulness to God and the gospel.

Not their skin color, not their nationality, not their socioeconomic status, or so on. We live in a world where people are being picked for jobs, positions, and rewards not based on competence nor merit, but arbitrary categories like the ones I just listed.

Let's continue to be a church that considers scripture our only plumb line in picking leaders to shepherd the flock. Let's avoid the socio-political mess that the world is entangled in and be salt and light by sticking to the biblical measurements of faithfulness, character, and integrity to God and the gospel.

[24 : 21] Look at 1 Timothy 3, 1 through 7 if you want to see what I'm talking about sometime. It's the heart of a man that matters. In application number three, let's honor those whom God has appointed as faithful leaders for us.

Paul tells the church of Philippi in verse 29, Honor such men. I'm so thankful that we have so many servant leaders in our church. And I'm not talking about the elders exclusively, although they're certainly and especially in view.

But let us rejoice at any righteousness, any good doing, any honorable thing that might be found. Later on in his epistle to the Philippians, Paul writes, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Well, you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Practice these things and the God of peace be with you. Philippians 4, 8 through 9.

So let's honor those who are faithful. And number four, final application. We rejoice and honor such things because such things are of Christ.

[25 : 43] We are to honor and love and praise Christ. Hebrews 1, 3 tells us, Christ is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature.

And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purifications for our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Christ was humble, joyful, kind, servant-hearted, to the point that he willfully poured himself out as a sacrifice for our sins.

And he did this without grumbling or questioning. Though if anybody has right to, it's the innocent son. Right? But yet he submitted to God, the Father.

There's none who compares to our righteous, perfect Lord and Savior. He came down in the form of man, poured himself out as a drink offering, bore the wrath of God, bore the cup that we deserved, that we might be reconciled to him for the sake of our faith.

[26 : 46] So the gospel undergirded everything, not just for Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, but the gospel of Christ. Christ was about the work of the gospel, about bringing good news to the captive, proclaiming liberty to them.

So we want to be about this work, as Christ is our great example of this work, and worship him in doing so. Let's pray. Amen.